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Third report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution 1829 (2008) in which the Council requested the Secretary-General to submit a report on the activities of the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone (UNIPSIL) every four months. The report covers the period from 1 June 2009 to 1 September 2009.

II. Major developments

A. Political developments

2. During the period under review, the political situation in the country was calm, with no incidents of political violence. In the spirit of the joint communiqué of 2 April, the major political parties continued interactions under the framework of the dialogue forums organized by the Political Parties Registration Commission, with the support of the United Nations.

3. A Joint Communiqué Adherence Committee, co-chaired by the Political Parties Registration Commission and UNIPSIL, was established on 29 April 2009. In addition to the All People's Congress (APC) and the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP), the membership of the Committee also includes the Sierra Leone police, the National Commission for Democracy and the Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone. The parties have shown keen interest in the work of the Committee, and their discussions have remained constructive and positive. In addition to contributing to the cessation of political violence, the joint communiqué has also provided a framework for developing biparty consensus on youth issues, trafficking in illicit drugs and the strengthening of the country's democratic institutions.

4. Efforts continued to be made to promote confidence not only among political parties but within the society as well. To that end, President Ernest Bai Koroma on 19 July swore in members of the Commission of Inquiry to investigate the allegations of rape and sexual violence reported during the 16 March 2009 attack on the SLPP offices in Freetown. An independent review panel to look into the acts of political violence and intolerance that occurred in March 2009 is yet to be constituted, however.

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5. The Commission of Inquiry, chaired by Justice Bankole Thompson, heard testimony from the alleged victims and witnesses. Financial and technical support for the work of the Commission was obtained from the Peacebuilding Fund, UNIPSIL, the United Nations Development Fund for Women and the Government of Sierra Leone. In a commendable spirit of political bipartisanship, members of the Commission were chosen by President Koroma from a list of nominees submitted by APC and SLPP.

6. Furthermore, several inter-party dialogues aimed at fostering political tolerance and non-violence were held in Freetown and in the provinces. The dialogues were organized by the Political Parties Registration Commission, with technical and financial support from UNIPSIL and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). In addition to SLPP and APC, the meetings were attended by the People's Movement for Democratic Change (PMDC), the National Democratic Alliance and by civil society organizations. Special inter-party dialogues and retreats focusing on the youth wings of the political parties were organized in Freetown from 8 to 11 June, followed by similar events at the district level, with the participation of members of Artists for Peace, a local musical group.

7. PMDC held its national delegates conference in Kenema from 24 to 26 July and re-elected Charles Francis Margai as its national leader. In an encouraging development, the opening ceremony of the conference was attended by President Koroma and ranking members of his APC party, as well as by the National Chair of SLPP, John Benjamin, and other senior officials of SLPP. In their respective speeches, the President and Mr. Benjamin called for political tolerance and non-violence.

8. With the conclusion of the PMDC national delegates conference, the major parties have now held their respective conventions. While SLPP and PMDC are yet to choose their presidential candidates for the 2012 elections, APC has nominated President Koroma as the party's presidential candidate for the 2012 elections.

9. The Independent Media Commission on 8 July announced that the licences of the political party radio stations owned by APC and SLPP would be withdrawn. The operations of those radio stations were suspended on 14 March by Vice-President Sam Sumana in light of their respective roles in the incidents of political intolerance and violence in parts of the country. On 15 July SLPP filed an action in the High Court challenging the decision of the Independent Media Commission. The High Court is yet to render a ruling on the matter.

10. Meanwhile, on 23 July the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation Act 2009 was passed by Parliament. The bill would provide the legal basis for the transformation of the state-owned Sierra Leone Broadcasting Service into an independent national broadcaster. National and international stakeholders, including UNIPSIL, are concerned, however, that some of the provisions in the bill could undermine the independence of the broadcasting corporation. President Koroma is yet to assent to the bill and has provided assurances that concerns raised by stakeholders pertaining to the independence of the proposed corporation would be addressed.

B. Security situation

11. During the reporting period, the Sierra Leone security agencies took measures aimed at curbing the cultivation of marijuana plants, destroying a large number of cannabis farms and significant quantities of the drug. The lack of logistical support, however, is impeding efforts by the Sierra Leone police to quickly deal with the growing drug problem. Large-scale cultivation of cannabis plant not only threatens national security but also inhibits the expansion of domestic crop farming.

12. A memorandum of understanding on the roles and responsibilities of members of the Joint Maritime Committee has been developed to ensure better coordination of Government efforts to protect the country's coastline and marine resources. In that regard, the World Bank announced that it would provide the Government a $20 million grant for fisheries protection, of which $6 million dollars would be set aside for the Joint Maritime Committee. The Committee will utilize a portion of the funding to procure a ship to conduct patrols in the territorial waters of Sierra Leone.

13. The Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces, with assistance from the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America, has begun preparations to contribute troops to the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID). The ability of the Armed Forces to deploy in support of United Nations peacekeeping operations is a testimony to the successful security sector reform process in which the country's international partners have played a major role.

14. On 13 and 14 July, President Koroma paid an official visit to Guinea where he met the leader of Guinea, Captain Moussa Dadis Camara. The two Heads of State discussed the Yenga border dispute and issued a communiqué reiterating their commitment to the peaceful resolution of the matter. To that end they also agreed to reactivate the joint technical team established earlier to address the border dispute.

15. Consequently, on 31 July the Guinean members of the technical team arrived in Freetown and met their Sierra Leone counterparts. Their deliberations focused on the use of the Mona River as the boundary between the two countries and on the demilitarization of the Yenga area. The technical team has submitted reports through the respective Ministers for Foreign Affairs to the Heads of State of both countries. The Government of Sierra Leone remains hopeful that the dispute will be resolved through bilateral channels. UNIPSIL provided logistical support to the technical team during its visit to the Yenga border area.

C. Socio-economic situation

16. Until June, Sierra Leone had effectively weathered the effects of the ongoing financial crisis. However, recent data from the International Monetary Fund suggest that the country's resilience is weakening. Real growth in gross domestic product in 2009 is projected to be 4 per cent, a 1.5 percentage point decline from the previous year. The recent 25 per cent depreciation of the local currency against the major currencies has caused a massive rise in consumer prices.

17. At the same time, export earnings have been hit by the downturn in global commodity markets. The value of exports in 2009 is projected to be $180 million, about 27 per cent smaller than in 2008. The volume of diamonds and rutile exported

in the first six months of 2009 has declined in comparison with 2007. In addition, falling world prices for diamonds have resulted in an even sharper decline in revenue. The total value of diamond exports has fallen by 49 per cent, or around $70 million.

18. Foreign direct investment, including remittances from Sierra Leoneans abroad, is projected to fall by about 25 per cent in 2009 over the previous year's peak of $69 million. Given those worrying developments, Sierra Leone is likely to rely on additional donor financing to close budget deficits if the global crisis is prolonged.

19. On 27 July, President Koroma launched the first test phase of the Bumbuna hydroelectric project. The second and third phases of the test will entail transmission of electricity from the project to the Kingtom power station and to the national power authority station, both in Freetown, for onward distribution to consumers. Construction of the Bumbuna hydroelectric project began more than 25 years ago, and its test phase is a milestone for the Government, given that energy supply is one of the major pillars of President Koroma's Agenda for Change (the second poverty reduction strategy for Sierra Leone).

III. Advancing the peacebuilding agenda

A. Special session of the Peacebuilding Commission

20. The Governments of Sierra Leone and Canada co-chaired a Peacebuilding Commission high-level special session on Sierra Leone on 10 June 2009 in New York. The Commission endorsed the joint communiqué and underscored its importance as a model for conflict prevention and resolution in post-conflict countries. The Commission urged UNIPSIL to assist in its implementation by the Government, the political parties and all concerned national actors. During the session, the Government's Agenda for Change was welcomed as the core strategic document for the country until 2012. The contribution of the United Nations to the Agenda for Change, the Joint Vision, was considered by the Commission as an innovative approach to peacebuilding, integrating political, development and humanitarian objectives.

21. The session also expressed support for the Joint Vision's 21 programmes and encouraged members of the Peacebuilding Commission to provide resources for the multi-donor trust fund to ensure implementation of the projects. The implementation of the United Nations Joint Vision is costed at $345 million for the next four years, of which approximately $141 million has already been secured. The Commission resolved that its engagement with Sierra Leone would continue to be based on the principles of national ownership, mutual accountability and sustained partnership. It would support the implementation of the Agenda for Change and focus in particular on (a) promoting good governance and the rule of law; (b) combating trafficking in illicit drugs; and (c) addressing youth unemployment.

B. Agenda for Change of the Government

22. Implementation of the Agenda for Change is being supported by a renewed drive towards strengthening aid coordination and management between the

Government and international development partners. The Ministry of Finance and Economic Development is restructuring in order to more effectively attract development assistance into the budget. My Executive Representative and UNDP are strongly supporting the aid coordination process.

23. A Consultative Group meeting to raise resources for Sierra Leone will be held in London on 18 and 19 November 2009. The conference will be co-hosted by President Koroma, the Minister for International Development of the United Kingdom and the World Bank Vice President for Africa. The Government will present its Agenda for Change, review the progress made in the key sectors of agriculture, transport and energy and highlight efforts made towards ensuring good governance. The United Nations Joint Vision, the World Bank and the Joint Country Assistance Strategy of the African Development Bank will form the basis for discussions at the meeting.

C. United Nations Joint Vision

24. The United Nations Joint Vision responds to four sets of overlapping requirements: (a) to support the Government's Agenda for Change; (b) to promote the core principles set out in the Paris Declaration; (c) to respond to the Secretary-General's decision on integration; and (d) to provide the framework for United Nations programming in the country until 2012. It situates the contribution of the United Nations within a much broader international effort to assist the Government of Sierra Leone to consolidate peace, stimulate economic growth, create decent employment opportunities, especially for the youth, fight organized crime, impede corruption and make progress towards the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals.

25. Following the launch of the Joint Vision in June 2009, the United Nations country team moved to develop detailed programmes and inter-agency agreements for common services and to establish the multi-donor trust fund. Those activities have been coordinated by the joint UNIPSIL and United Nations country team Strategic Planning Unit.

IV. Support to democratic institutions

26. The Political Parties Registration Commission successfully mediated an intra-party dispute between two factions of PMDC just before the convening of the Party's national delegates conference on 24 July 2009. The Commission is currently being restructured, with technical support from UNDP and UNIPSIL. The Commission's district code of conduct monitoring committees are also being revamped to promote peacebuilding in the districts and local communities. In addition to financial assistance from the Government of Sierra Leone, the Commission received support from the Peacebuilding Fund and the "election basket fund" supported by the United Kingdom Department for International Development, the European Union, Irish Aid, Norway, Japan and Denmark.

27. The National Electoral Commission continued to benefit from the "election basket fund" as well as from allocations provided by the Government of Sierra Leone, which has also made available vital infrastructural and capacity-building

assistance. During the reporting period, the National Electoral Commission conducted a local council by-election in the Dwarzak constituency in Freetown. Following the passage by Parliament of a Chieftaincy Bill, which clarifies the responsibility of the National Electoral Commission in the conduct of Chieftaincy elections, the Commission announced that elections would be held to fill about 40 paramount chieftaincy vacancies in November 2009.

28. The Independent Media Commission continues to assert itself in the regulation of the print and broadcast media in Sierra Leone. It has reassembled media monitors in the regions and communities and opened a branch office, with assistance from the Peacebuilding Fund, in Sierra Leone's second-largest city, Bo. It also adjudicated about 15 complaints brought against the media and recently rendered an important decision concluding that certain allegations made against the principal opposition party, SLPP, were unfounded. The Commission carried out a training programme for journalists in Bo and plans to conduct similar programmes elsewhere, including in Freetown. In addition to support from the United Kingdom Department for International Development, the Commission will receive financial assistance from the Peacebuilding Fund for the procurement of media monitoring equipment.

29. Parliament remained active during the reporting period and enacted new laws covering various aspects of national life. To enhance continued development of the capacity of Parliament, support is being provided through the Peacebuilding Fund to cover the organization of training programmes for the parliamentarians and to provide for their logistical and information technology needs.

30. Within the framework of the joint communiqué, the Peacebuilding Fund has also provided $909,606 for strengthening the capacity of the police in addressing political violence. To that end, UNIPSIL worked collaboratively with the United Nations Office for Project Services to procure equipment, vehicles and training materials for crowd-control personnel and professional investigators. Equipment for the Sierra Leone professional standards unit will be delivered shortly, and modalities for crowd control and professional standards training are being established.

V. Support to human rights and the rule of law

31. The Government has taken significant actions to address impunity, including through the restoration of military justice with the recent re-establishment of a court martial board of the Sierra Leone Armed Forces.

32. A legal aid programme has been established by the Sierra Leone Bar Association to provide assistance to vulnerable groups, and the construction of additional courthouses and residential facilities for judges is in progress. Prison conditions continue to improve, except in the areas of water, sanitation and health facilities. Renovation of the Mafanta Prison to relieve congestion at the overcrowded Pademba Road Prison is almost complete.

33. UNIPSIL also continued its engagement with civil society organizations, including by supporting training and capacity-building. Notwithstanding these efforts, it is recognized that more needs to be done to address harmful traditional practices in the society, especially violence against women.

A. The Sierra Leone National Human Rights Commission

34. With technical support from UNIPSIL, the National Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone continued to implement its statutory functions. The Commission has established regional offices in all of the country's three provinces. President Koroma, in an unprecedented move, organized an interactive forum with his Cabinet on 11 August to which he invited the Commissioners to discuss the Commission's 2008 annual report and its recommendations.

35. Notwithstanding its financial difficulties, the Government continues to support the work of the Commission, including by covering salaries and constructing a new office complex into which the Commission is expected to relocate by 2010. The sustainability of the Commission and its programmes remain a critical challenge, however. As a result, the United Nations Joint Vision has identified the Commission as a priority institution for support, and I appeal to international partners to support the National Human Rights Commission.

B. Recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission

36. With support from the United Nations, the implementation of the reparations programme, as recommended by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, has made significant progress. Thus far, the programme has registered 28,000 war victims and conducted symbolic reparations in 18 chiefdoms. A number of programmes have also commenced to provide fistula surgeries for survivors of sexual violence during the war and to make available microgrants for livelihood support activities.

37. However, with funding from the Peacebuilding Fund for those activities expected to run out by the end of 2009, the sustainability of the reparations programme will be jeopardized unless additional resources are mobilized. A five-year strategic action plan has been developed, which President Koroma is expected to launch simultaneously with the Victims Trust Fund in September. The United Nations Joint Vision has also identified reparations as one of its priority programmes, and I appeal to development partners to support the reparations programme.

VI. Special Court

38. On 17 July 2009, the Management Committee of the Special Court for Sierra Leone approved the updated completion strategy of its work, setting February 2011 as the expected completion date of its judicial activities. To date, the Special Court has completed all of its trials except the appeals from the judgement against leaders of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) and the Charles Taylor trial, which is being conducted at the seat of the International Criminal Court in The Hague. Judgement in the RUF appeal is expected by the end of October 2009. The Court has also signed sentence enforcement agreements with several States, which are at various stages of incorporating the agreements into their domestic legislation.

39. As part of the Court's legacy programme, it is building national capacity through secondment, comprehensive training programmes and targeted technical

assistance to local institutions in the country. The Court is also working with the Government of Sierra Leone to explore potential uses for the Court's 11.5-acre facility upon the completion of its core judicial activities in early 2011.

40. Significant funding will continue to be required to ensure completion of the Court's core judicial activities, the maintenance of the residual institution and the cost of sentence enforcement. I appeal for additional support to facilitate those vital remaining activities of the Court.

VII. Integration of the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone and United Nations country team activities

41. As the first fully integrated mission led by the Department of Political Affairs, UNIPSIL's success or failures will contribute to determining the shape and functions of future peacebuilding missions. For that reason, my Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs has been keenly monitoring the establishment and progress of UNIPSIL and visited Freetown during the reporting period.

42. Under the leadership of my Executive Representative, who also serves as the Resident Coordinator of the United Nations country team and the UNDP Resident Representative, the United Nations system in Sierra Leone has developed a new approach to peacebuilding, with a fully integrated peacebuilding strategy, the United Nations Joint Vision. The main aim of that approach is to provide more focused and effective assistance to the Government and people of Sierra Leone. The approach is based on a high degree of programmatic integration of United Nations activities. In the Joint Vision, UNIPSIL and the United Nations country team have agreed to work together on five priority areas and to implement cooperatively 21 programmes, guided by a set of joint benchmarks. They have also put in place a system for joint programming and programme evaluation.

43. In order to support programmatic integration and ensure the most efficient use of resources provided by Member States, UNIPSIL and the United Nations country team have also attained a high degree of operational integration, through the establishment of common facilities and services such as joint regional field offices, a multi-donor trust fund, a joint strategic planning unit, a medical clinic, security services and a vehicle repair shop.

44. The level of programmatic and operational integration is complemented by efforts to achieve greater coherence and aid effectiveness of overall international assistance to Sierra Leone. My Executive Representative, together with the Representative of the World Bank, is working with the Government to establish an effective aid coordination architecture. He is also co-chairing regular meetings of development partners. Furthermore, UNIPSIL and the United Nations country team support the operational activities of Member States through the joint regional field offices and logistical support, including air transport for visiting delegations and assistance missions.

45. During the reporting period, the efforts of the Peacebuilding Commission's configuration for Sierra Leone and UNIPSIL have proven increasingly complementary and mutually reinforcing. The Peacebuilding Commission, with the

support of UNIPSIL, has contributed to the enhancement of aid efficiency and improved coherence within the United Nations system.

46. UNIPSIL is a much leaner and more cost-effective peacebuilding office in comparison with previous peacekeeping missions in Sierra Leone. The size of the office is limited to 73 staff, of which 32 are locally recruited. Also, the ratio of substantive units to administrative support units has been reversed, with about 75 per cent of the staff being assigned substantive tasks.

47. The staff of UNIPSIL is expert-oriented, with specialists working on issues such as trafficking in illicit drugs, combating corruption, human rights, police development, democratic institutions, independent public broadcasting, media development, decentralization and the constitutional review. UNIPSIL relies increasingly on national experts, with a total of 13 national professional posts. The blend of international specialists with national experts has proven productive and responsive to the country's priorities. About 75 per cent of all staff posts of UNIPSIL are now filled and it is expected that the occupancy rate will reach 90 per cent by October 2009.

48. In setting up UNIPSIL, efforts have been made to lay the ground for phasing out its activities and ensuring its seamless transition into the normal United Nations country team system. For that reason, UNIPSIL has a light footprint, has chosen its specialists jointly with United Nations organizations and will rely on United Nations organizations to carry out all operational activities. The high degree of programmatic and operational integration will facilitate a future exit strategy for UNIPSIL.

VIII. Critical peacebuilding challenges

A. Corruption

49. The Anti-Corruption Commission continued to make progress in tackling corruption. On 6 July, the Commission presented its 2008 annual report to President Koroma. The report highlights progress and challenges as well as recommendations for strengthening the Commission. Those include the creation of a fast track anti-corruption court with dedicated judges and prosecutors, the amendment of the Legal Practitioners Act to allow the Commission to employ would-be barristers to address the shortage of prosecutors, and a permanent head office. President Koroma has assured the Commission of the commitment of the Government to fight against corruption.

50. As part of its preventive strategy, the Commission worked with a number of Government agencies to review their internal procedures and systems in order to reduce the risk of corruption. In collaboration with Parliament, it began developing a code of conduct for parliamentarians. A similar initiative is under consideration for local government officials. On 3 June, the Commission arrested two officials of a Government-owned company for offences under the Anti-Corruption Act 2008, including the misappropriation of public funds. On 9 June, it secured the conviction in the High Court of a former Government Ombudsperson for various corrupt practices. More than one billion leones were collected in penalties by the Commission.

B. Illicit drugs

51. To strengthen the capacity of the Government of Sierra Leone in combating trafficking in illegal narcotics, UNIPSIL, in cooperation and coordination with the United Kingdom, the United States, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL), provided the Sierra Leone Joint Drug Interdiction Task Force with a two-month training regimen which consisted of investigative, interdictory and tactical techniques required to deal with organized crime and trafficking in illicit drugs. Further, with the assistance of UNDP, members of the Task Force have received vital equipment that will be critical for enforcement actions against drug trafficking. The United States Government will provide the Task Force with additional equipment.

C. Youth unemployment

52. Youth unemployment and underemployment still present significant challenges to the Government of Sierra Leone. To address the problem, the Government, the United Nations and other development partners are supporting ongoing youth employment initiatives in the following areas: skills training, microfinancing, entrepreneurship training, work for cash and food for work. Also under the Joint Vision, a specific programme with emphasis on creating employment for large numbers of youth has been developed. The Government is finalizing the establishment of a national youth commission, which will provide strategic direction and much-needed coordination of all youth employment activities among all the ministries.

IX. Observations

53. The steps taken towards the implementation of the 2 April joint communiqué have enabled the strengthening of the peace consolidation process in Sierra Leone. The joint communiqué has galvanized key sections of the country, particularly the political party youth groups, in their determination to arrest tendencies that detract from the democratic credentials that Sierra Leone has been trying to strengthen since the end of the war.

54. Additional efforts, however, are required by all national stakeholders to ensure that the present momentum is sustained. Crucial to the sustainability of the process is the steadfast support of Sierra Leone's international development partners. Internally, political intolerance and violence will have to be dealt with as a matter of priority, especially as political parties brace themselves for the 2012 elections.

55. High youth unemployment and trafficking in illicit drugs continue to pose considerable challenges to the consolidation of peace. Equally, the global economic situation has negatively affected Sierra Leone through the reduction of foreign aid, external investments and overseas remittances. Especially worrying is the fact that Sierra Leone continues to register extremely high infant and maternal mortality and poverty levels, which call for increased engagement by the international community to help reverse those negative trends.

56. Sierra Leone's achievements thus far in the area of democratization are in part a result of the strong support provided by international partners and the Government of Sierra Leone to the National Electoral Commission, the Political Parties Registration Commission, the Sierra Leone police, the judiciary, the National Human Rights Commission, the Anti-Corruption Commission and other important State institutions. I am grateful for the generous support provided by the country's development partners. As the peace consolidation process continues, I appeal for unrelenting assistance, including from the Government of Sierra Leone itself, to strengthen State institutions and keep reform efforts on track.

57. The completion of the much awaited constitutional reform process is long overdue. To expedite the process, I call on the Government to consider establishing, as soon as possible, a participatory consultation mechanism to enable wider input by civil society and other national stakeholders. UNIPSIL stands ready to provide technical support for the exercise, which, when completed, should make an important contribution to the peace consolidation process.

58. While I recognize that there is still much more work to be done, I commend the efforts being made by President Koroma and the country's political parties, including the major opposition party, the SLPP, in promoting political tolerance and stability.

59. UNIPSIL has continued to make steady progress in implementing its mandate to support the efforts of the Government of Sierra Leone to consolidate peace in the country and to ensure an integrated United Nations approach to peacebuilding. Taking into account the many complex challenges that remain, I would like to recommend to the Security Council that it extend the mandate of UNIPSIL for a period of one year, until 30 September 2010.

60. Finally, I wish to thank my Executive Representative, Michael von der Schulenburg, the staff of UNIPSIL, the United Nations agencies and programmes as well as the World Bank and the African Development Bank for their dedication in realizing the mandate of the mission.